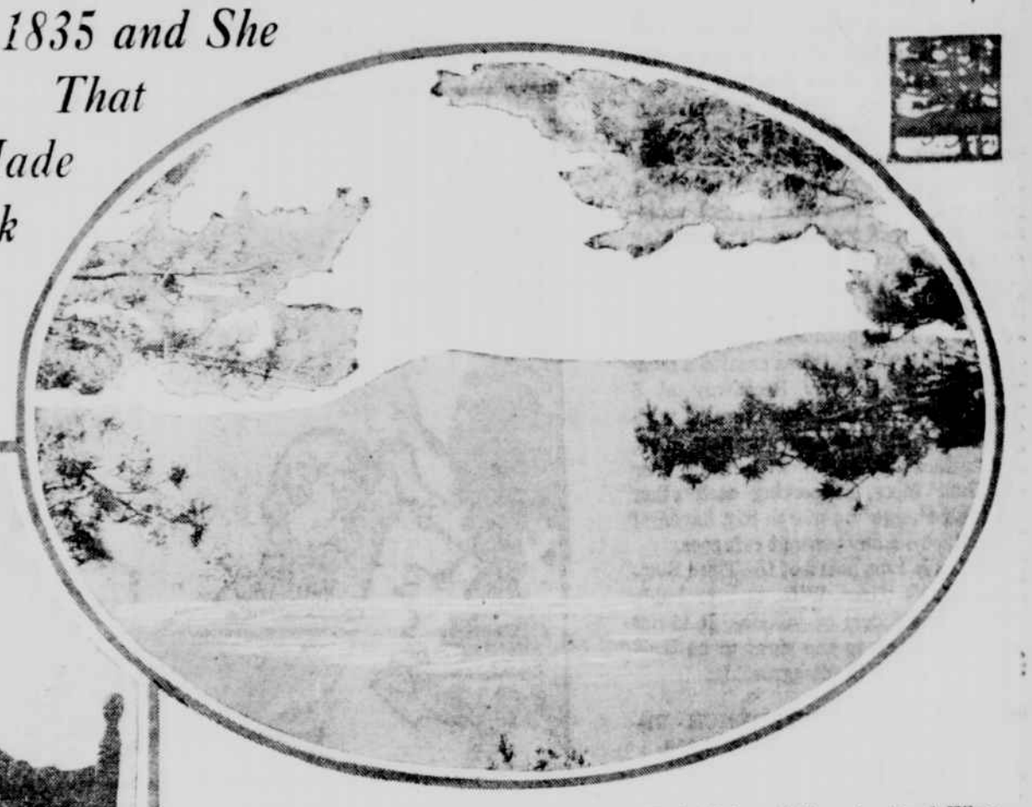
LITTLE OBEDIA, WHO CARRIED THE FAMILY GRIDDLE

She Came Into the North Woods in 1835 and She Has Been There Ever Since. That Griddle? Oh, It Has Made At Least 30,000 Flapjack Breakfasts Since Little Obedia Carried It

In the Rapids of the Raquette River, Where "Adirondack" Murray and "John" Are Supposed to Have Shot in a 70-Pound Rowboat.

MRS. JOHN PLUMBLEY
One of the Few Remaining Pioneers of the Adirondack Forests.



In This Water the Houghs and Plumbleys Took Fish and Deer for Food When the North Woods Were a Real Wilderness.

By PAUL M. PAINE.

HOW many of the 1,033,679,680 passengers carried by American railroads in the last reported year were carried into the region known as the Adirondacks I am not at present informed. There were a good many of them. No fewer than nine railroad lines and branches contribute to the total, and some of the lake shores are more thickly settled than some village streets. Automobiles carry more than railroad trains.

It is interesting to realize that all this vast annual migration to the land of the granite and balsam has grown from nothing within the memory of living persons. It is interesting to know that Verplanck Colvin, now a railroad president living in Albany, was really and truly an explorer when, a boy of twenty, he got himself appointed state surveyor by the State of New York and began to map the country just west of Lake George and Lake Champlain. Jim Flynn, the fire guard on Owl's Head Mountain, will show you, if you ask him, the copper bolt bedded in the stone which Colvin left there in 1871, and Colvin's own reports of that and succeeding years, as different as possible from the dry statistics of scientific public documents generally, contain narratives of adventure in the unexplored wilderness to remind you of Nansen, Stuck and Stefansson. It was not until his time that the highest source of the Hudson, Lake Tear-in-the-Clouds, was known.

ADIRONDACK REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS WHEN BEDS WERE OF SNOW.

I have heard Paul Smith tell of the days when he came into the woods from Vermont, guiding parties of hunters who slept in the snow, because not even Adirondack camps were to be found in those days, and I have seen Mitchell Sebatis, the honest Indian, whose importance in the development of the Long Lake country is shown by the fact that a mountain and a postoffice bear his name. His sons are to this day citizens of high repute in that same region. One of them, I am told, laid out an important road from Long Lake to the west.

But among all these pioneers of the Adirondacks Mrs. Obedia Plumbley is unique. She came into the wilderness not as an explorer, but as a settler. That was in the year 1835, when she was six years old, and she has been living within a stone's throw of the place ever since. When she celebrated her eighty-seventh birthday yesterday she rounded out a career of unusual quality. She gave me some of the details of it as I sat with her not long ago in the roomy and convenient kitchen of her son's house at Deerland. The younger Mrs. Plumbley, busy with her household tasks, aided with remarks in parentheses, which heightened the interest. As, for instance, the incident of the flapjack griddle. Little Obedia carried the griddle when she came into the woods by the water route from Old Forge. That was her part of the duffel of the Hough family, of which she was next to the youngest member. Five of the six children were girls. What the others carried Mrs. Plumbley did not say, but she regarded her part as important, and the younger Mrs. Plumbley says that there hasn't been a breakfast without flapjacks in that house since then. Which amounts to the handsome total of no less than 30,000 flapjack breakfasts.

What gives Mrs. Plumbley's narrative historic importance is the fact that it was her husband, John Plumbley, who was the guide for Adirondack Murray and the constant allusions to "John" in the book "Adventures in the Wilderness" mean none other than John Plumbley. It was that book, in turn, which introduced the Adirondacks to the American public, and this combination of circumstances makes the circle complete, with Mrs. Obedia Plumbley at the centre, one of the few survivors, perhaps the only survivor, of the really old days of the settlement of that part of the wilderness, perhaps the last of the little group whose names are closely associated with the real opening of the forest.

"I've done everything that any woman could do," said Mrs. Plumbley, "or man, either."

One could readily believe her, for the fire of energy and endurance still burns in her eyes, and it is only within the last two or three years that she has grudgingly given up the habit of walking the three and a half miles to Long Lake village and back again whenever she wanted to do a little shopping.

"We came from Lewis County, where we had a good farm with everything we could want—cows, sheep, pigs and all. But there was a man who owned some land in here, and he promised father a farm if he'd come, so he sold out and came. He had to buy the farm, after all. I don't know why he thought he had to come.

"Of course, the reason why Hough thought he had to come is simple enough. He had the thirst for the new country, the same feeling that drove the prairie schooners to Pike's Peak.

"The Plumbleys were living on the next farm," she continued, "but there weren't many neighbors. We got our mail and whatever else we had to have from Minerva. That's thirty miles away. There wasn't much to see. But there was enough to do. We could get enough fish, of course, and if we wanted meat we could kill deer. I killed seventeen myself one fall. We didn't waste powder when we could help it. Sometimes we used to kill 'em by getting 'em out in the lake and holding their heads under water. I've killed 'em that way."

Lest there should be any shrugging of the shoulders at this part of Mrs. Plumbley's narrative, I remark casually that Murray alludes to the drowning of a deer by a guide named Martin, doubtless Stephen Martin, of Lower Saranac. In the days when hunting with jack lights at night was permitted drowning deer was fair sport.

"Yes, I've done about everything," she went on. "One winter when father and the other men were off loggin' and mother and I was alone, the wood got low. There wasn't going to be enough to last till they came back. So I got the axe and went into the woods and cut some trees and chopped them up and brought them in."

Or, perhaps she brought them in first and then chopped them up; on second thought I believe that is the right version.

That is how Obedia Hough, later Mrs. John Plumbley, kept house at Long Lake about the middle of the nineteenth century. Those who undergo the experience of pioneers in the wilderness are not idolators. They do not worship the forest, although they are likely to find in it mysteries unfathomable. Adirondack Murray, for instance, declares solemnly that in the oppressive calm preceding a thunderstorm great trees are likely to fall in the woods, and he has a hair raising tale about an Indian ghost-maiden haunting the Raquette River, causing inquisitive persons to find themselves shooting over Buttermilk Falls before they know it. These and many other tales of wonder are part of the stock in trade of woods people, who know that city folks like to hear them, and like to hear them told with becoming reverence and gravity, in a perfectly honest-to-gosh manner. That side hill golumphus, with his fore and aft legs on the port side shorter than the starboard, so that he can navigate a mountain side with ease and comfort, is among these mysteries.

You wouldn't expect to hear Mrs. John Plumbley exclaiming that she thinks mountains are just lovely, or that deer are perfectly sweet. Mountains in her early days were part of the day's work, and deer were meant for meat as a general thing. Yet it depended somewhat on circumstances.

"We saw a doe comin' across the meadow toward the barn one day," said Mrs. Plumbley. "I could tell that she had been shot, and we could hear the dogs comin' from over toward Little Fork. My daughter here ran out to see it. The doe saw her, but kept on comin' right toward her. 'You better let her into the barn,' I told her; 'the dogs'll be here before you know it.' Sure enough, into the barn they went, side by side, the wounded deer and my daughter. Somehow or other that doe knew that there was a chance for her if she came where we were."

Mrs. Plumbley knew Adirondack Murray, of course, but she had little to say about him; the fact is, of course, that when Murray was in the woods John Plumbley was generally with him, and the two of them were likely to be anywhere between Chateaugay and Fulton Chain. I didn't ask her about "Honest John Plumbley's" version of the story of shooting Buttermilk Falls. Murray, it will be remembered by all well versed Adirondackers, was a first class orator, lecturer and preacher before he became known as a sportsman and chief of the Adirondackers. He was the minister of the famous old Park Street Church in Boston.

DID HE SHOOT THE RAPIDS? SURELY. MURRAY WAS A MINISTER.

These evidences of Murray's standing as a man of knowledge and veracity are, I submit, overwhelming. In view of them Murray's chapter on "Running the Rapids" should be read. There is no question as to the location of the rapids he means, for at the close of the chapter he says, "That night I slept upon the floor at Palmer's." Palmer's was otherwise known as Uncle Palmer's, a hotel which existed about 1867 in the neighborhood where John Plumbley, Amos Hough and Mitchell Sabatis lived. That is, it was at the southern end of Long Lake. The rapids are therefore the rapids of the Raquette River, and the falls which are the climax of the story are without the slightest doubt Buttermilk Falls, about a mile from the head of the lake.

I examined the rapids less than a month ago, and climbed around the falls and photographed them coming and going. Two ladies obligingly perched upon a rock to furnish a scale for the height of the fall, and the picture with them in it indicates that the Raquette descends not less than fifteen feet from the first take-off to the plunge basin below. It does not do this all at once, but jumps four or five feet, then smashes itself against the surface of a rock, then gets itself together for another jump. The boat in which John and Adirondack Murray seem to have negotiated this descent was evidently the Adirondack guide boat of the present day, with not more than three-eighths of an inch of wood between the navigator and the most violent stretch of moisture between Little Forked and Upper Saranac.

The question which will never cease being asked in the vicinity of Buttermilk Falls is, "Did Adirondack Murray shoot the rapids?" The answer, no doubt, will endure as long as the rapids run, and the fall continues to roar. Ask Mrs. Obedia Plumbley and she will say: **"John Plumbley always answered that question one way. He said, 'Well, Adirondack Murray was a minister.'"**

AND NOT A SINGLE SECRET SERVICE MAN ACCOMPANIED THEM ON THEIR WAY

Gressy Photo.

AN EVENT of especial interest in official and government circles took place last week, when sixteen ex-Presidents of the United States were loaded on a truck, tied up with rope and driven away from the Tribune Building through a cheering crowd. They composed a waxwork exhibition which was being shifted to other quarters.

The picture shows the distinguished nomads just before they left, looking for all the world like so many French revolutionists in a tumbril en route to the guillotine. General Washington is seen standing by the driver, trying to round up the crowd for Mr. Hughes and Protection! Thomas Jefferson, two behind him, is just barely holding himself back from jumping to his feet in rebuttal. Behind him is some statesman who has lost his head completely.

The crowd thought it very funny. And it was funny. Yet when a little boy jumped up behind and dusted John Quincy Adams's nose with a handkerchief there was a general feeling that he had gone too far. There is such a thing as "noblesse oblige" even among wax ex-Presidents.